The March of Suffrage; From Trials to Triumph

By Emma Bugbee

IT WAS a great war which gave woman suffrage its first impetus in the United States, and now another war has hastened the hour of its success. It is not, however, in the last analysis the war which has brought about the victory. It is the forty years since the suffrage amendment was first introduced into the United States Senate; forty years in which American women learned to formulate their own opinions and stick to them. Therefore it is fitting that we should, in the hour of victory, glance backward once more to the stalwart souls who began the crusade in the days when it was not popular.

The first mention of woman suffrage in American history is the famous letter written by Mrs. Abigail Adams, in 1776, to her husband, John Adams, when the Constitution was being framed. What a lot of trouble it would have saved if John had only had a little more respect for his wife's request.

"I long to hear that you have declared an independency," she wrote, "and, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than were your ancestors."

In 1848 the women drew up their first "Declaration of Rights" at a convention in Seneca Falls, N. Y. They demanded changes in laws which made woman "morally an irresponsible being"; compelled her to give unquestioning obedience to her husband and deprived her of occupation in profitable employments.

"Man," read the wrathful climax, "has assumed the prerogatives of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for woman a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God."

The woman's movement grew and flourished side by side with the Abolitionists, but to the grief of the women when the amendments to the Constitution were framed the word "male" was inserted. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony made a second attempt to have the word "sex" included in that clause which concerned "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." All their efforts were unavailing.

In 1878 the woman's cause was first heard from on the floor of Congress, when Senator Sergeant, of California, introduced the "Susan B. Anthony" amendment.

It was then that suffrage "got on the front page." It was not such a long story that The New York Tribune of that day published, but it was a biting and a scathing one.

The women, we read, actually invaded the Senate corridors, and had the impertinence to buttonhole the Senators on their way to luncheon, so that it was most uncomfortable.

The story of woman suffrage during the forty years that intervened is a story of persistence and faith such as the annals of no other cause can boast. Campaigning in those days was a far different thing from the campaigns by automobile and Pullman car which our women make to-day—although we do not forget the hardships in rural districts undergone even by the girls of this suffrage generation, or the last journey over the Rocky Mountains, which cost the life of the most beautiful suffrage campaigner, Inez Milholland Boissevain.

The greatest figure of these days, the woman who more than any other one led the slender ranks of the women who would not forget nor renounce their cause, was Susan B. Anthony—"Aunt Susan" of the red shawl and the gentle voice, the quick wit and the abiding faith. She it was who planned the long years of the campaign, seeing far in the future tht successes which are now come to pass, even mentioning 1920 as the year of the final victory.

"You had to be born early to get ahead of your Aunt Susan." This was the caption under which "The Woman Citizen" published recently a reminder to New York suffragists that they should take unto themselves little credit for inventing suffrage stunts. "Aunt Susan" published a suffrage paper, "The Revolution," whose motto was "Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less." This publication was sold on the streets of New York fifty years ago by "girl newsies, clad in red and green uniforms, with netted bags in which to carry their papers."

Then came the English militants.

Historians are going to ponder much over the strange awakening which came to the suffragists of this country as a result of the English agitation, which, in the main, Americans deplored.

In 1910 the New York public was horrified to see a parade of yellow taxicabs filled with "unsexed creatures, who would upset all the dignity of our municipal government," headed for City Hall. Later the streets were filled with the "new women," haranguing the crowds from terrible things called soap boxes. Suffragists merely laughed and said that since the public could not go to their parlor meetings they would go to the public.

New organizations sprang up, headed by suffragists who had been to England and worked with the terrible Mrs. Pankhurst. They did "lawless things" like chalking the sidewalks with notices of their meetings and parading through the East Side with a hurdy-gurdy and a monkey.

The suffrage world was torn into two factions—the conservatives, led by Dr. Shaw and Mrs. Catt, and the radicals, led by Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch. Most of the excitement of those days emanated from the little dingy basement headquarters of the Women's Political Union, where Mrs. Blatch sat beside her kitchen fire chuckling and cooking up new stunts.

And presently the stunts were not so terrible, and the conservative group adopted them, one by one. There was a parade in 1911; a tiny, straggling thing, much frowned upon. There was another in 1912 and another in 1913, in which all the organizations of the city joined, a "pageant" now, in the language of the press, much admired. There were such things as "General" Rosalie Jones's famous hikes to Albany and Washington, suffrage aviation flights, suffrage prize cows, and even a suffrage prize fight.

Most of this intense suffrage activity centered in New York City. The parades especially demonstrated to the people the enormous, unsuspected growth of "Aunt Susan's" movement. The results began to show in Albany, where the half dozen suffrage societies had organized a joint legislative committee.

With many friends the numbers of their enemies had no terrors for the suffragists. Undaunted, they demanded of the Legislature an immediate re-submission of the question to the people. In two years it was passed.

In the meantime, the West had been busy, and seven new states had been added to the suffrage family. Dr. Shaw got "Aunt Susan's" diamond pin out of the safe deposit vault—an enamelled American flag with four suffrage diamonds in the blue field—and had the seven new star diamonds inserted, with prayers of thanksgiving.

The new stars stood for Washington, 1910; California, 1911; Kansas, Oregon and Arizona, 1912; Alaska, 1913, and Montana and Nevada, 1914.

With the representatives of these new states in Congress pledged to vote for a national amendment, the suffrage leaders reorganized their campaign in Washington, and the Susan B. Anthony amendment was introduced into the arena of practical politics.

Then developed one of the most dramatic, and at the same time most complicated chapters of the whole history of suffrage in this country, a chapter which includes the great schism in suffrage ranks, and comes to a climax with the suffrage pickets before the White House last fall.

In 1912 there appeared suddenly on the suffrage horizon two young disciples of Mrs. Pankhurst, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns. They were American school teachers, studying at English universities when the militant movement in London first challenged their attention, and then won their allegiance. They returned to America, full of the new spirit, which bade suffragists make their cause a political issue and an irritation in the halls of lawmakers. As chairman of the Congressional Committee—Alice Paul arranged the first parade of suffragists ever held in Washington, a parade led by Inez Milholland Boissevain on a white horse and "General Rosalie Jones" and her hikers in brown pilgrim cloaks, who had travelled on foot all the way from New York to present to the new Democratic President on the day of his inauguration the petition of women for democracy.

Woodrow Wilson arrived in Washington on the afternoon before his inauguration.

"Where are all the people?" he asked, gazing blankly at the almost empty streets.

"Oh, everybody's over on the avenue looking at the suffragettes," answered the reception committee.

This parade was the first "militancy" in Washington—a militancy which consisted merely of parades and pageants and visitors at the White House who insisted on seeing the President. Sedate Washington, however, was much stirred, and the affairs attracted much attention in the press of the entire country. Mrs. Catt and Dr. Shaw, startled at the energy of their young assistants, tried to curb them, but the two youngsters had worked with Mrs. Pankhurst, and they cared not a fig for the decorum of Washington. They broke away from the National American Woman Suffrage Association and from the Congressional Union, attracting to their ranks the malcontents and radicals from the mother organization, and swinging into line also a number of newcomers in the suffrage world.

The real break, however—the break which broke hearts as well as suffrage letterheads—the break which made the peculiar contribution of the Congressional Union to suffrage annals—a contribution whose value to suffrage is going to be debatable until the final authority speaks many years from now—was Alice Paul's invention of the theory of party responsibility.

"The Democratic party is in power," said Miss Paul, "therefore it is up to the Democrats to pass our bill. The Republicans couldn't do it if we asked them to. We will hold the Democrats responsible, and if they don't pass our bill we shall defeat them for reelection."

In the Congressional elections of 1914 the Congressional Union organized the women voters of the West into a fighting group, who campaigned against all Democratic candidates, for the one reason that the Democrats had not passed the suffrage amendment.

Undoubtedly the Congressional Union made enemies.

Dr. Shaw with tears in her eyes cried:

"They have lost our amendment for us! I shall never forgive them!"

On the other hand, Miss Paul and her followers claimed that Congress knew but one language, votes, and that by the mere threat of adverse votes they could keep Congress in line for future favors. Neither Democrats nor Republicans would risk another campaign with the women attacking them.

The Woman's Party was organized by Miss Paul at the Panama-Pacific Exposition and gathered signatures all that summer to a monster petition of women voters of the West. These were carried across the country by women automobilists and presented to President Wilson with great ceremony. By this time President Wilson's enormous influence as the leader of his party had been well demonstrated. The Woman's Party directed all their petitions to him, declaring that if he would but say the word Congress would jump through the suffrage wheel. Finally, when the death of Inez Milholland Boissevain had wrung the hearts of suffragists all over the country, they began their picketing of the White House as a protest against the "needless sacrifice of women's lives" in this movement. The President had repeatedly told them that he could not lead his party in this matter, that it was a question for the sovereign states to decide for themselves, but Miss Paul and Miss Burns retorted that it was a national and not a state issue, and that they would stand at his gates to remind him of that fact.

In this country as soon as war was declared against Germany the suffragists offered their services to the Federal and state governments. In New York state the referendum campaign was already under way, so the suffragists gave up street meetings and parades and devoted the strength of their organization to taking of the military census, to war gardening and food conservation, and feeding the soldiers at Plattsburg and Camp Upton. Practically the only suffrage campaigning that was done at all was the securing of signatures to a great statewide, house to house petition. This was signed by over one million women and it silenced forever the plea of the anti-suffragists that women do not want the vote.

Then came the two parades—one a parade of the Red Cross, with Fifth Avenue filled with marching women in blue and gray uniforms, ready for overseas duty, or wearing the picturesque white headgear which spells bandages and compresses for wounded men. This was not a suffrage parade at all, but it was a woman's parade and New York was learning that suffragists and women were much the same. Close upon it followed the suffrage parade, a parade of mothers with service stars folded over their hearts, mothers who faltered a bit in the march as the newsboys' raucous cry sounded between the brass bands—"Americans in trenches in France!" Behind the mothers came the women who had answered with what talent they had their country's call, the women census takers, the women police, the women chauffeurs, the conductorettes and farmerettes.

New York went "over the top for suffrage" with a majority of 140,440 votes, to the surprise of the world—and it must be confessed to the momentary astonishment of the suffragists themselves.

And the final chapter began.

"Why did it take so long?"

Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, recognized leader of the cause at the moment of its triumph, smiles tolerantly when the impatient younger generation puts that question.

"The whole world is always unanimously against any new thing," she says. "In the beginning of any new movement there is a hard struggle, carried on by a few pioneers who are willing to buck the tide of public opinion rather than go with it. Imperceptibly the tide changes and the floaters as well as the fighters join the ranks."

Newark, N. J., 1913—The start of the famous suffrage hike from New York to Washington captained by Rosalie Jones.

(Right)—Susan B. Anthony, first president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

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New York, 1917—Twenty-five hundred women carried boards bearing the signatures of more than a million New York State women who wanted to vote

(Left)—Washington, 1913—A great suffrage pageant which ended in a riot

Woman's New Duty—Setting America's House in Order

By Carrie Chapman Catt

WOMEN who have campaigned for the vote have had occasion to know well how great is the menace to American institutions from an illiterate non-English speaking electorate.

These women did not wait to be awakened by a world war which should tax the national consciousness almost to the breaking point. They had met the black spots in American citizenship before. They had seen groups of men, unable to read or speak the English language, marshalled to the polls to defeat the ideals of freedom for which, as American-born women of democratic ancestry, they had long struggled.

When the National American Woman Suffrage Association made its offer of service to the United States Government in February, 1917, its programme emphasized the need of a campaign of Americanization, which at that early stage of the war was elsewhere generally looked upon as of slight importance. One governmental officer sneered openly at the idea that Americanization was needed in war preparation.

But the National's prediction, based on women's experience all over the country, proved correct. It was not long before the Federal authorities were appealing to Governors and state councils of defence to push forward this movement, and a national Americanization conference was called by the government.

What was the reason?

Almost as soon as practical efforts began to mould into a homogeneous army the mass of men gathered by the draft it became manifest that one of the greatest handicaps to swift mobilization lay in the inability of thousands of men to understand English commands or to read camp directions.

Dr. Claxton, head of the Federal Board of Education, tells of the request of one commander for a machine gun corps. Out of the group sent him one hundred and thirty-seven men had to be sent back to be taught sufficient English to read their instructions.

Army figures for drafted men showed that one quarter of the 1,552,256 men examined were unable to read American newspapers or to write home to their families. They were unable to understand the signs posted about the camps or the written orders from headquarters.

In the first draft, thirty to forty thousand men hampered the speeding up of the army preparations because they could not sign their own names, read their manual of arms, understand signals or follow the signal corps in time of battle.

"Miracle, Perhaps"

It is a miracle, perhaps, that so hampered America made such progress as she did. But what might she not have done had this handicap not existed?

Quickly organized efforts to teach these soldiers in a few weeks what they should have known before the war began were phenomenally successful, yet there were some factories, where huge government orders were being rushed, whose owners would not permit the interruption of work by education classes.

When the war ended the task of Americanization was still incomplete. Soldiers and ammunition workers have come back to a peace programme and to the perils and friction of reconstruction but dimly understanding the meaning of the democracy which they fought to save and which they must now work to protect and cherish.

It is right at this point that the women of the country have sad knowledge of the use which may be made of the illiterate vote to defeat righteous ends.

Read the lists of referenda through which state after state has passed to gain the ballot for its women. Often the women who have led those campaigns have been descendants of Revolutionary ancestors. In their veins has flowed perhaps the blood of the very men who devised and created American democracy, yet they have stood powerless beside the polling booths while illiterate men, often only a few years in this country, have been voted in blocks against them.

These new citizens, drifting into this country through the naturalization courts, whence they emerge at voting citizens, without knowing how or why, are often the articulate voice of an invisible government which somehow manages to speak its will through them.

In the whirlwind campaigns common to democracies the final frenzy for success makes men turn to strange and harried methods to gain it. They find themselves driven into last-minute compromise and unholy alliances in order to turn votes this way or that at the behest of great commercial interests. Many a good cause has gone down to defeat because of this use of the massed vote of the illiterate.

"In Every Party"

This influence is not Democratic, it is not Republican, it is found in every party when political expediency runs amuck and principles are left behind.

In order to clarify what we mean by a programme of Americanization, it is best at once that the world should not connote what Germanizing the Alsatians has meant in Europe. It should mean the effort to give all foreign-born residents in the United States an incentive to be true Americans.

We have seen, during the war, with what rapidity and success the problems of unifying the country may be met when united governmental action is brought to bear upon it.

Why may not a programme for a patriotic peace be carried forward with equal success if all political parties, state and national governments will unite upon a method of work and throw themselves whole-heartedly into its leadership? Its object should be not merely to Americanize our foreign citizens but to naturalize the whole electorate, for there is no more reason why the United States should tolerate an indigenous than a transplanted illiteracy.

There is no reason why every citizen, man or woman, foreign or native-born, should not take an oath of allegiance, become educated in the meaning of American ideals, and become thoroughly informed on federal, state and local problems.

To this end, I make the following nine proposals for a better America:

I. Compulsory Education in Every State.

Most of our educational laws are now inadequate and the period of school attendance is not sufficiently enforced. Schools or teachers should be furnished the remoter sections of the country; and there should be a definite period set beyond which not one child over fourteen should be found in this country who cannot read or write. And that time ought not to be far off, not later than 1925.

II. Education of Adults.

This is an end which will be difficult to attain, since adult illiterates are apt to be apathetic about learning. Extension courses in the public schools will not be enough to arouse the ambition of those wearied by a hard day's work. But the fillip to ambition from knowing that American citizenship depends upon it, should help to awaken eagerness for the study of American institutions.

Women Will Lead

There are organizations of women, whose vision is broad, who are eager and willing to enlist themselves in the patriotic service of creating a better national spirit, who could and would give a sympathetic and understanding leadership to such a movement. Much has been done, under great handicaps, by these women. How much more might be done if they had the support of a national policy to sustain them.

III. English Should Be Our National Language.

This does not mean that the knowledge of other languages needed in commercial and diplomatic positions should be taken out of our public schools. It does mean that no school, public or private, giving courses of general education, should be conducted in any language other than English. During the war it was discovered that there were large numbers of public schools in rural districts conducted in the German language and where no word of English was spoken.

IV. There Should Be Higher Qualifications for Citizenship and More Impressive Ceremonials of Naturalization.

Our naturalization law is more than a hundred years old, and has been but slightly modified since it was drawn up. In the meanwhile our immigration has become gigantic, its problems complicated and immense. What began as a small stream of newcomers to this country, with interests differing but slightly from those of the native stock, had become, just before the war, practically unrestricted and immensely diverse. Our naturalization law needs amending.

V. There Should Be Direct Citizenship for Women, Not the Present Indirect Method by Which Women May Be Qualified to Vote Through Citizenship by Marriage.

Woman's qualification for the ballot should include individual naturalization, compelling the wife to attain the same degree of intelligence for her duties as has her husband.

VI. Education in Citizenship Should Be Extended to the Foreign-born Through Their Foreign Language Newspapers.

A knowledge of the principles of government, the meaning of American ideals, simple lessons in citizenship, explanations of political events, ought to be made compulsory by the government in every foreign newspaper, and copy for such lessons should be provided by the Federal government.

Impressive Oath

VII. Every Citizen, Male or Female, Native or Foreign-Born, Educated or Ignorant, Should Take an Impressive Oath of Allegiance to the United States as One Qualification for the Vote.

VIII. There Should Be Schools of Citizenship in Every Rural School District and City Ward in Conjunction with the Public School.

Attendance should be made compulsory for all youth and would be to all intents and purposes compulsory for adults if a certificate from such a school were made a qualification for naturalization and for the vote.

Such schools, with the effectiveness of their programmes proved and with their functions coördinated with the naturalization courts and election boards, would doubtless require a generation for effectiveness, but if national support could be given this ideal a certificate of citizenship ought eventually to become the proudest token of successfully applied democracy.

IX. There Should Be an Educational Qualification for Every Voter in the United States After a Definite Date.

This test ought to be sufficiently thorough to signify real intelligence and to eliminate any need for emblems on the ballot to guide the voter to his party ticket.

There is in these United States a rapidly increasing number of women who are full voters, partial voters or near voters. These women have not only striven for their citizen rights as no other group in the United States has ever striven, but, in thousands of instances, they are daughters and granddaughters of other women who have longed and worked for the ballot. In proportion as they have worked the significance of the symbol of political freedom has become of importance. These women can never esteem lightly or treat with unconcern the citizenship which it has cost them time and energy and sacrifice to obtain. Neither will they train their sons to regard as purchasable or negligible this gift bought at a great price.

It is to these millions of new women citizens, whole-hearted for American betterment, that the nation must look for aid, and they are willing to give that aid.

They are equipped to give it. They are democracy-conscious as no other group is conscious.

In hundreds of thousands of cases they are the mothers of boys who fought for the world freedom, and to whom that fight was more sacred because of their mothers' belief in human freedom.

Within four months women of eight states have been granted the right to vote for the President of the United States. Within six months the women of three other states have been granted suffrage on equal terms with men.